



**The Center for  
Family Justice**

## Testimony Regarding

**HB 5037, An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023**

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

**CHAIRPERSON:**  
**Kathryn Maiolo**  
*KM Solutions, LLC*

**Rosinne Chlala**  
*The Festivities Foundation*

**Sandra Carmichael**  
*Community Leader*

**Donna Craft**  
*Community Leader*

**Pamela J. Dale, Esq.**  
*Law Office of Pamela Dale, LLC*

**Jill Fitzburgh**  
*Community Leader*

**Sofia Goncalves**  
*People's United Bank*

**Chris D. Griffin**  
*Bank of America, Private Bank*

**Michael E. Lyngaas**  
*Community Leader*

**Sarah Cwikla Mastropole**  
*Stantec*

**Kristin Okesson**  
*Connoisseur Media*

**Reuel Parks**  
*C.H.A.M.P., Inc.*

**Matthew C. Reale**  
*Attorney, Anthony & Reale*

**Scott Redfern**  
*Dell Technologies*

**Nicole Schmidt**  
*Bridgewater Associates*

**Rev. Sara Smith, Esq.**  
*United Congregational Church*

**Lisa M. Todd**  
*Webster Bank*

**Diane Winston**  
*Winston Strategic Partners, LLC*

### CFJ BOARD FELLOWS:

**Destiny Sammut**  
*Silver Hill Hospital*

**Antoinette S. Stephens**  
*Alliance For Community Empowerment*

**PRESIDENT, CEO:**  
**Debra A. Greenwood**

### Judicial Department Budget

**Appropriations Committee**  
**February 16, 2022**

Good evening Senators Osten, Winfield & Miner, Representatives Walker, Candelaria & Pavalock-D'Amato, and members of the Committee. The Center for Family Justice (CFJ) provides life-saving services to victims of domestic violence, sexual violence and child abuse in Bridgeport, Stratford, Fairfield, Trumbull, Monroe and Easton. Services include counseling, support groups, safety planning, court-based advocacy, transportation, assistance with securing basic needs and job training, and coordination with local law enforcement, civil legal services, among others. We are a member agency of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) and The Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence (Alliance).

We thank Governor Lamont for his proposal to allocate **\$14,865,300 in FY23 from the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund (CSFRF) to the Judicial Branch to offset anticipated reductions in federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grants to victim service organizations** and urge your support. It is our understanding that this amount includes \$3,772,000 for CCADV and its 18 member organizations, including The Center for Family Justice for FY23. Additionally, this amount includes \$2,560,000 for the Alliance and its 9 member agencies, including The Center for Family Justice for FY 23. The Governor's proposal is clear that the final amount of funding allocated will be contingent on the final amount of reduced federal funding to the state.

As way of background, VOCA is funded through the fines and fees generated by federal prosecution, largely of white-collar crime. The VOCA Fund does not contain any tax-payer dollars. The previous federal administration relied more heavily on the use of deferred prosecution and unfortunately federal law directed fines and fees from that type of prosecution to the General Treasury as opposed to the VOCA Fund. The federal VOCA Fix Act was signed into law this past summer ensuring that, moving forward, all fines and fees from deferred prosecution will be deposited into VOCA. However, due to several years of reduced deposits prior to the fix, the VOCA Fund has largely been drawn down resulting in an anticipated 50% reduction in victim assistance grants for the next two fiscal years to all states, including Connecticut, until the Fund can be replenished.

VOCA is a substantial funding source for our work to support domestic and sexual violence survivors. A 50% reduction in funding would devastate our ability to meet the growing needs of survivors. At The Center for Family Justice, VOCA funding supports 13 full time advocates who serve nearly 4,000 clients annually. These services include criminal court advocacy, civil court advocacy, counseling, support groups, safety planning, transportation, assistance with securing basic needs, coordination with law enforcement, civil legal assistance and self-sufficiency services.

Several months ago, Sarah (\*name changed) walked into the court office for our Family Violence Victim Advocate. Her former partner had shot and killed her current partner and although she was provided with a criminal protective order through the criminal matter, that order did not protect her children. She was desperate for a civil restraining order, as well as custody orders that would prevent the offender from having visitation time with the children. However, Sarah was traumatized,



*Hope Starts Here*

753 Fairfield Avenue, Bridgeport, Connecticut 06604 • Tel: 203/334-6154 • Fax: 203/579-8882 • [www.centerforfamilyjustice.org](http://www.centerforfamilyjustice.org)





## The Center for Family Justice

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

#### CHAIRPERSON:

**Kathryn Maiolo**  
*KM Solutions, LLC*

**Rosinne Chlala**

*The Festivities Foundation*

**Sandra Carmichael**

*Community Leader*

**Donna Craft**

*Community Leader*

**Pamela J. Dale, Esq.**

*Law Office of Pamela Dale, LLC*

**Jill Fitzburgh**

*Community Leader*

**Sofia Goncalves**

*People's United Bank*

**Chris D. Griffin**

*Bank of America, Private Bank*

**Michael E. Lyngaas**

*Community Leader*

**Sarah Cwikla Mastropole**

*Stantec*

**Kristin Okesson**

*Connoisseur Media*

**Reuel Parks**

*C.H.A.M.P., Inc.*

**Matthew C. Reale**

*Attorney, Anthony & Reale*

**Scott Redfern**

*Dell Technologies*

**Nicole Schmidt**

*Bridgewater Associates*

**Rev. Sara Smith, Esq.**

*United Congregational Church*

**Lisa M. Todd**

*Webster Bank*

**Diane Winston**

*Winston Strategic Partners, LLC*

### CFJ BOARD FELLOWS:

**Destiny Sammut**

*Silver Hill Hospital*

**Antoinette S. Stephens**

*Alliance For Community Empowerment*

### PRESIDENT, CEO:

**Debra A. Greenwood**

overwhelmed and had absolutely no idea how to begin or what steps needed to be taken. The advocate provided Sarah with support, informed her of the options available to her through our family court system and then proceeded to assist the client with filing for a restraining order, as well as emergency custody orders. The advocate was by Sarah's side on the day of the hearing to provide much needed emotional support. Not only was this VOCA funded advocate there for Sarah in the moment of crisis, but after doing a comprehensive intake, she was able to identify the full scope of her needs and ensure that she was connected to other services. If we do not fill the VOCA gap, victims and survivors like Sarah will have no one to support them and provide them with these necessary services.

COVID-19 has had a disastrous effect on those experiencing domestic and sexual violence. We are seeing a tremendous increase in services provided to victims and survivors. In FY 21, CFJ served 4,183 clients, an 8% increase from FY 20. However, in the first quarter of FY 22, the numbers jump considerably from the first quarter of FY 21.

- Direct service staff served 2,360 clients – a 44% increase
- Criminal Court services are up 65%
- Lethality Assessment Program (LAP) calls are up 41% (law enforcement calls to the DV hotline when responding to a DV call).

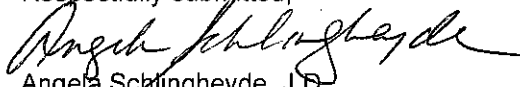
Victim advocates are already under-resourced and struggle to meet the needs of victims and survivors. A 50% reduction in funding would devastate our agency, as well as the other agencies in the state. Who will provide these life-saving services? What will become of domestic violence victims, sexual violence victims and child abuse victims if we must close our doors? Where will they get counseling? Who will help them file a restraining order? Who will help them navigate the criminal justice system or assist them in finding the basic necessities they need for themselves and their children when they are forced to flee a domestic violence situation?

We know that the VOCA funding gap is not a problem that was created by this or any other state government. Connecticut's Governor and General Assembly have been a model for supporting a strong response to domestic and sexual violence and we thank you for your continued leadership. Providing temporary, one-time state funding to address this federal funding issue will help ensure that our domestic and sexual violence service system can meet the ongoing needs of survivors without interruption.

We understand that the budget adjustments before you are specific to fiscal year 2023. It is important to note that the federal government anticipates the federal VOCA funding reduction will be present for both fiscal years 2023 and 2024. **To the extent that CSFRF funds are available beyond FY23, we respectfully request that the Appropriations Committee allocate those funds to cover the VOCA funding gap for both FY23 and FY24. For CCADV and its 18 member organizations, including The Center for Family Justice, that would mean a total of \$7,544,000 (\$3,772,000 in each of FY23 and FY24). For the Alliance and its 9 member organizations, including The Center for Family Justice, that would mean a total of \$5,120,000 (\$2,560,000 in each of FY23 and FY24).**

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



Angela Schlingheyde, J.D.

Director of Civil Legal & Court Advocacy Services, The Center for Family Justice



*Hope Starts Here*

